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The Aesthetics of Virtue: Exploring Chinese Thinking through Traditional Chinese Paintings

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Philosophy of Management Conference 2018

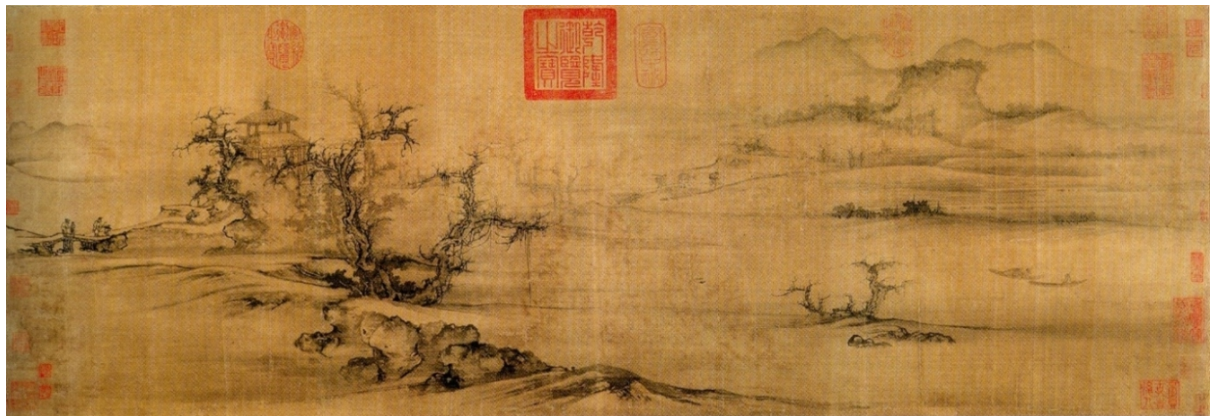
June 25th to 28th, 2018, University of Greenwich, UK, London

Workshop Proposal, Track: Ancient Philosophies in Management

The Aesthetics of Virtue: Exploring Chinese Thinking through Traditional Chinese Paintings

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First dream of Guo Xi (郭熙, ca 1001-1090): “Old Trees, Level Distance”, Hand scroll, ink and colour on silk, 35,9 cm x 104,8 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA



Nine Dragons is a handscroll painting by Chinese artist Chen Rong from 1244. Depicting the apparitions of dragons soaring amidst clouds, mists, whirlpools, rocky mountains and fire, the painting refers to the dynamic forces of nature in Daoism.

‘A large square seems cornerless,
a great vessel is the last completed,
a great sound is inaudible,
a great image is formless,
an invisible law is nameless.’

(Chapter 41, The Book of Tao and Teh, Lao-Tzu, c. 500 BCE/2003)

This workshop explores the link between Chinese philosophy, ethics and aesthetics based on a classic motif in Chinese traditional paintings: water and mountains (*shan shui* 山水).

In contrast to merely a lecture on Chinese philosophy and way of thinking, this workshop shall help participants to develop a more profound understanding of the Chinese way of thinking through a metaphorical exploration of Chinese traditional art. Beyond the artistic dimensions of those works, the 山水-style paintings selected for this workshop can help participants to essentially visualise *yin-yang* dynamism. Through a mindful discussion following Daoism and ancient metaphors, Chinese philosophy and its unique way of thinking will be presented in a more tangible way.

Through the metaphorical exploration of paintings this workshop is also linked to ‘aesthetic learning’. While the link between ethics and aesthetic learning is not new (see for example 19th century German philosophers like Schiller, Fichte, Humboldt and Nietzsche on that matter in Stolzenberg & Ulrichs, 2010; Schiller, 1879), the link between aesthetics and virtue ethics is neglected (see for attempts to connect aesthetics with virtue ethics: Koehn, 2017; Collins, 2014), and the idea of Daoism being a virtue ethics is virtually non-existent (see for first attempts to connect Daoism with virtue ethics: Hennig, 2016; Hennig, 2017a; Hennig, 2017b). Thus, by connecting Daoism to virtue ethics on the one hand and to aesthetics by way of paintings on the other, this workshop aims to provide insights into how virtuous characteristics in Chinese philosophy (Daoism) are reflected in a visual and tangible way through motifs in traditional Chinese paintings.

Eventually, this connection to virtue ethics and aesthetics, as well as a deeper understanding of this particular worldview and way of thinking shall enable the workshop participant to also understand the positive effects which come with this philosophy being applied in a

management context, like impacts on leadership behaviour and organisational values (see Hennig, 2016; Hennig 2017a; Hennig, 2017b; further Gerstner, 2011; Lee et al., 2008; Lee et al., 2013; Lin et al., 2013 more specifically on leadership in this context). Thereby, this workshop generally aims to contribute to arts-based methods in management education (see Taylor & Hansen, 2005; Taylor & Ladkin, 2009; Weick, 2007).

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